

FIREGUARD.



IT is difficult in the midst of war to think of fire except in terms of enemy action; of incendiaries and high explosives. Yet fire is a constant danger, knowing no boundaries of Peace and War. In a normal peacetime year the loss caused by fire in Britain alone was assessed at no less than £12,000,000. Fire is far from being mastered but the research chemist and the British chemical industry have substantially reduced its threat to our lives and property. Fire risks have been minimised by the provision of fireproof synthetic products to replace inflammable building materials, by great improvements in the insulation of electric wires and cables, by non-inflammable cinematograph films, by the discovery of chemicals and processes for treating wood and even textiles so as to enable them to resist fire, and by research into the causes of explosions in coal-mines, flour-mills, distilleries and the like. For the fire-fighter, whether the trained fireman or the housewife faced with blazing curtains, the chemist has built up an armoury of weapons, defensive and offensive. Asbestos uniforms and goggles enable the fireman to attack the fire. Fire extinguishers containing special ingredients enable him to overcome outbreaks, such as petrol fires, which plain water might only spread. The most usual of these ingredients are carbon dioxide foam and carbon tetrachloride which form a blanket of inert gas over the fire. Other extinguishers represent a pre-arranged chemical reaction with containers of bicarbonate of soda and an acid ready to mix and react the moment they are required. The respirators which give protection against smoke or fumes are triumphs of chemical skill. Burns can now be treated efficaciously with chemical compounds, synthesised in the laboratory. The years of chemical research and production have stood the nation in good stead. They lie behind the magnificent efforts of the fire-fighting services, professional and civilian, which have fought the incendiaries and high explosives of enemy fire-raisers in the cities of Britain since 1940.



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